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The Dying Voices in *The Fault in our Stars*

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Abstract:

Man is a mortal being and it is a fundamental truth. Day by day, the mortality rate has been increasing either through natural deaths or unnatural deaths. The present social scenario witnesses the maximum number of deaths occurring due to newborn diseases such as Cancer. John Green's *The Fault in our Stars* is a heart touching and bittersweet story of the young cancer patients, Augustus and Hazel. The dying voices of the cancer-prone youths, their psychology and societal approach towards their physical disabilities are worth mentioning. The Social responsibility towards diseased, the spiritual support of the support groups and the role of parents, the positive approach of doctors and the hospital staff, is very crucial for making the short lives of cancer-prone youths feel good and secured. The financial problem is one of the worst factors which enhance the stress and strain of the diseased and their parents. The social support groups and the rich can extend their helping hand by providing moral and monetary support to the cancer-prone youths with weak financial status. The mental support to overcome the complex, nervousness and stress is a challenging task for the doctors as well as the parents of the cancer-prone youths.

Keywords: Mortality, diseases, cancer patients, psychology, frustration, weak economy, society, parents, responsibility, support groups.

The Irony of man's condition is that the deepest need is to be free of the anxiety of death and annihilation; but it is in life itself which awakens it and so we must shrink from being fully alive.

Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death*

The Man is a mortal being and it is a fundamental truth. It is evident that one day every man is sure to die. But the deaths that occur may vary from person to person. Some depart from this life through natural death while others of unnatural death. When life is lost at the old age it is said to be natural death, and if the death occurs due to accidents, diseases and natural calamities, it is considered unnatural. In the present social scenario, many people are prone to non-natural deaths because of newborn diseases such as swine flu, heart attack and many other diseases.

Cancer is one of the widespread and endangering diseases which are engulfing the lives of many youth, adults and old to death. The present paper entitled *The Dying Voices in The Fault in Our Stars* is the tragedy of youth suffering from cancer. The paper aims at exploring the dying voices of the cancer prone youth and their discomfoting situation in the society.

The Fault in Our Stars is one of the most heart breaking works of John Greene, a winner of Edgar Award and the American Library Association's Michael L. Printz Award. The present novel is a heart touching and bittersweet story of life and love. In the present paper, an attempt has been made to analyze the dying voices of cancer-prone youths from their psychological and social perspectives. The entire story revolves around the two main characters Hazel Grace and Augustus Waters. Both hail from Indianapolis. They both are neighbors as well as disease mates. Hazel Grace and Augustus suffer from Thyroid cancer, Augustus from bone cancer, Isaac from eye cancer, Micheal from Leukemia and Lida from appendiceal cancer. The thought of cancer itself leads to depression even among healthy ones. In the case of cancer patients it is worsened as they see only death ahead. Despite the efforts of their parents to save their children, cancer affected children make their way to the aboard of heaven. The very short span of life on this terrestrial, teach them in abundance at times leading to depression and sometimes to a ray of hope for life. In fact it's a conflict between life and death and an everlasting strife to lead a normal life.

As a building block of humanity, society owes a great responsibility towards diseased people. In western countries, support groups are formed to extend mental and spiritual support to the diseased ones. In the meets, they recount their depressingly miserable life story. In the novel, Patrick, the support group leader once recount his past saying, "How he had cancer in his balls and they thought he was going to die but he didn't die...and now he is mostly friendless, eking out a meager living by exploiting his concertastic past, slowly working his way toward a master's degree that will not improve his cancer prospects". (p.5) The voice of Patrick was gloomy, depressing and reminding only death ahead. And it was routine of the support group to extend a moral support to the cancer patients, especially to youth to express themselves and feel relaxed."Fights were recounted, battles won amid wars sure to be lost; hope was clung to...tears were shed."(p.11) Their discussion leads to an understanding that they are different from healthy persons and they need to battle, even though the end of the battle is sure to be lost as Isaac lost eyes and Augustus lost his limb and ultimately his life.

As a part of the tradition of a support group, they recall the list of dead people (cancer) and pray for them. Even their prayers evince the idea that they are cancer survivors and need a spiritual support to face the truth of death. " Lord Jesus Christ, we are gathered here in your heart, literally in your heart, as cancer survivors, you and you alone know us as we know ourselves. Guide us to life and the light through our times of trial. We pray Isaac's eyes, Hazels lungs, for James throat. We pray that you might heal us and that we might feel your love, your peace, which passes all over understanding. And we remember in our hearts those whom we know and loved who have gone home to you: Maria and Kade and Josph and Haley and"

(p.14) The prayer makes everyone feel tugging at one's emotions, while generating questions about the life and death. Their prayers and their concern for the live and dead reflect their psychology. They find themselves insecure and seek Gods help for ethical support.

The role of parents in the patient's health is very significant. The manner in which Hazel's parents, especially her mother cares and moves with her like a shadow is truly heart touching. Hazel's mother supports and assists her right from the rising of bed and to the getting off to the bed. She celebrates her birthdays as 33rd half birth at the age of sixteen. She wants to make every day for Hazel a special day. She takes her everywhere, where she wishes to go. Once Hazel refers to her mother saying, "I liked my mom, but her perpetual nearness sometimes made me feel weirdly nervous."(p.45) It illustrates her mother is much concerned about her. She takes her to shopping, support group, school, and even to Amsterdam to meet the author of An Imperial Affliction, Peter Van Houten.

The psychology of the cancer patients who are going to be short lived is also evident from the death of Caroline Mathers, which disheartens Hazel. She couldn't help herself imagining about death and it makes her nervous and disappointing. However, she realizes that all such thoughts were wasted moments. "I told myself that imagining a mate in my brain ...affect the invisible reality going on inside of me and therefore all such thoughts were wasted moments in a life composed of a definitionally finite set of such moments. I even tried to tell myself to live my best life today."(p.97) Hazel to come out of the trauma decides to live a best life on that day. It is rightly observed that "As humans, our awareness of death is inherent. When confronted with this reality, we tend to find ways to self-soothe that, though largely unconscious, are limiting to us in our lives, our relationships and our goals."(Lisa)It is truly distressing and horribly traumatic for those who suffers from cancer and see death ahead.

The behavioral problems of the diseased are also needed to be observed. The behavior of Caroline Mathers is heart touching. The anger, frustration over not being not able to speak, the manner in which she screams is very worse when she gets the attack of cancer. When she comes to the conscious, she asserts, "People talk about the courage of cancer patients, and I do not deny that courage. I had been poked and stabbed and poisoned for years and still, I trod on.... In that moment, I would have been very, very happy to die."(p.106) The pains and throbbing make them discomfort. "The pain was always there, pulling me, inside of myself, demanding to be felt. It always felt like I was waking up from the pain when something in the world outside of me suddenly required my comment or attention."(p.142) Not only patients but also the family members and caregivers also undergo stress. The pains and sufferings of the loved ones make family members more harrowing. It is aptly asserted, "The emotional stress of living with a diagnosis of cancer and its treatment, fear of recurrence, and the distress imposed by living with the day to day physical problems can create a new or worsen preexisting psychological distress for people living with cancer, their families, and other informal caregivers."(Edler).

A feeling of embarrassment is common among the diseased. They get a kind of complex when they find themselves different from others. The way Hazel carries her oxygen containers is one of the causes of her awkwardness. “A gate agent came over and Switched my oxygen container out with one provided by the airline. I was embarrassed to have this lady kneeling in front of me while everyone watched.”(p.143) Hazel’s emotions and feelings are very moistening, when she find people in the airport were observing her. “I could feel everybody watching us, wandering what was wrong with us, and whether it would kill us, and how heroic my mom must be, and everything else. That was the worst part about having cancer sometimes. The physical evidence of disease ‘separates you from other people. We are irreconcilably other and never was it more obvious than when the three of us walked through the empty plane, the stewardess nodding sympathetically and gesturing us toward our row in the distant back.” (p.144). It is apparent that the sympathetic approach of the people and their staring at the diseased also cause a kind of frustration among them. It is lucid that the patients need a supportive hand rather than sympathy. Psychologically sympathy arouses a kind of frustration and helplessness among the diseased causing the breakdown of their health. A feeling of otherness is also stressful as it isolates them from the physically healthy society. Isolation on the other hand also leads to nervous breakdown among the diseased. It is the prime responsibility of friends, relatives and support groups to extend a support to the diseased. The psychological needs of the family members should also be taken care of along with the diseased.

The Weak economy is one of the problems of the diseased. Several parents stake their lives to provide better treatment and hospital facilities for their diseased children. On that account, they even face the financial problems. Hazel’s parents also suffer from the weak economy as they spent much of their money on her treatment. It becomes obvious when Hazel realizes that she couldn’t fulfill her wish to visit Amsterdam, an international travel. Hazel recounts, “It occurred to me that the reason my parents had no money was me. I’d sapped the family savings with the phalanxi for copays and mom couldn’t work because she had taken on the full-time profession of hovering over me. I didn’t want to put them even further into debt.”(p.79) The poor economy leads to double stress among the patients as well as the parents. The rich can support such weaker sections by giving a helping hand and by providing a monetary support in the treatment of the patients.

The Weak social support is one of the reasons for the behavioral problems of the patients. When an individual suffers from cancer, the family members, friends and neighbors are supposed to help the patients in performing the tasks. If they fail to do so, the psychological problems of the patients are enhanced. It is rightly observed, “When these informal supports are lacking, the effect of the psychological problems are compounded.”

Doctors’ fraternity also holds a great responsibility in providing a moral support to the diseased and their parents. Doctors and the staff of the hospitals also need to pay a good attention towards the patient. A good doctor must provide a positive motivation to them instead of

demoralization. Doctor Maria in *The Fault in Our Stars* passes unhealthy comments on Hazel's health and the lung transplantation. "You would not be considered a strong candidate for a transplant unfortunately". (p.116) Her comments not only hurt Hazel but also her parents. Doctor Maria's comments demotivate them and their feelings." I understood: no use wasting good lungs on a hopeless case. I nodded trying not to look like that comment hurt me. My dad started crying a little. I didn't look over at him but no one said anything for a long time, so his hiccupping cry was the only sound in the room. I hated hurting him. Most of the time, I could forget about it, but the inexorable truth is this: they might be glad to me around, but I was the alpha and omega of my parent's suffering."(p.116)

In this world of pains and pleasures, people live with a ray of hope to live a happy and healthy life. And several times the troubled people wish the world to be a wish-granting factory. The love birds like Hazel and Augustus feel God has done something unfair with them. They broke down when they realize they are short lived. On such occasions, Augustus try to ease Hazel saying, "I'll fight it. I'll fight it for you. Don't worry about me, Hazel Grace ...I'll find a way to hang around and annoy you for a long time."(p.144) Hazel's reply on Augustus's memorialization is very thoughtful. She says, "We live in a universe devoted to the creation, and eradication of awareness. Augustus Waters did not die after a lengthy battle with cancer. He died after a lengthy battle with human consciousness, a victim- as you will be- of the universe's need to make and unmake all that is possible."(p.266) Hazel's words confirm the tendency of a victim's effort to win over his sickness, to battle and to overcome his fears, terror and horrified feelings about the nearing death.

Even though man is aware of the fact that he is a mortal, yet he aspires to live long and to live life fully without any diseases, without any hurdles. After all it's a human mind, no ordinary man escapes from such situation. Even old man, who lived his life fully prefer to be mortal than an immortal. And when they hear God's call, their dying voices become more soft and hopeful to escape the nearing death. All that one can do is to support, assist and be compassionate towards the dying ones, diseased ones to make them feel good, secured without any resentment, so as to carry their happy and lovable moments to the heavenly abode.

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